United Nations A/62/552

General Assembly

Distr.: General
29 November 2007

Original: English

Sixty-second session
Agenda item 118
The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

Letter dated 26 November 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to transmit herewith the concluding observations of the Chair of the International Conference on Terrorism: Dimensions, Threats and Countermeasures, held at Tunis from 15 to 17 November 2007 under the high patronage of the President of the Republic of Tunisia and jointly organized by the United Nations, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (see annex I).

Also attached is the text of a statement by President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali at the official inauguration ceremony (se annex II), as the participants to this international event decided to adopt this statement as a reference document for the work of the conference.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annexes circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 118.

(*Signed*) Habib **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations

07-61912 (E) 191207

Annex I to the letter dated 26 November 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Concluding observations of the Chair of the International Conference on Terrorism: Dimensions, Threats and Countermeasures, held at Tunis from 15 to 17 November 2007

The International Conference on "Terrorism: Dimensions, Threats and Countermeasures" took place in Tunis from 15-17 November 2007 under the high patronage of H.E. Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Tunisian Republic. The Conference was jointly organized by the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations, the Islamic, Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). In his opening address, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon noted that the conference aimed at implementing the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy unanimously adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2006 (A/RES/60/288).

The vision and concrete proposals contained in the opening statement by H.E. Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Tunisian Republic as well as forward looking statements by H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and H.E. Mr. Abdulaziz Altwajri, Director General of the Islamic and Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) constitute an important substantive platform of the Conference.

The prevailing view of the participants of the conference was that terrorism and extremism constitute a threat to the peace, security and stability of all countries and peoples. Terrorism has no justification no matter what pretext terrorists may use for their deeds. It was underlined that terrorism should be understood in its own political, religious, historical and cultural context. Societies experience terrorism differently and its motives are diverse. However, every country faces an urgent need to prevent and suppress terrorist crimes as well as in addressing their national-specific conditions that are conductive to the spread of terrorism.

President Ben Ali underscored the urgent need to address the spread of terrorism from a global perspective especially since "terrorism has become a transcontinental scourge that unsettles international relations and threatens security and stability in the world". Terrorists may exploit vulnerabilities and grievances which help to breed extremism locally, and connect quickly with others at the international level. Keeping in mind that the most efficient remedy to the problem of terrorism was cooperative prevention, the conference aimed to: (a) identify "vulnerable" areas exploited by terrorists in the social, economic, cultural and educational spheres (b) recommend appropriate solutions and (c) dispel misapprehension about Islam.

Within the framework of the above objectives, the Conference focused on five key themes: Conditions conductive to terrorism, Challenging stereotypes and promoting inter-faith dialogue; Education for preventing terrorism; Dialogue among cultures and civilizations and their role in countering terrorism; and Role of international and specialized organizations in countering terrorism.

As deliberations proceeded, it was made clear that exclusive reliance on enforcement solutions only could not address the various menaces of terrorism. Indeed, the need to formulate a comprehensive, collective and inter-governmental approach to combating terrorism highlighted the urgency for collaborative efforts aimed at addressing conditions conducive to terrorism. As Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsangolu, OIC Secretary General noted, there is a growing need to be more concerned with tackling "defamatory campaigns that seek to incite a particular civilization against another, thereby inflaming violence, hatred and extremism, and ultimately leading to terrorism".

Furthermore, the participants believed that terrorism flourishes in environments of discontent, exclusion, humiliation, poverty, political oppression, and human rights abuse as well as in the environment of regional conflicts. It profits from weak State capacity to maintain law and order. These vulnerable areas are exploited by terrorists to mobilize recruits and justify violence. None of the religions are a cause of political radicalism and extremism. Religious doctrine may be 'tools of mobilization' rather than a direct cause. Islam does not cause terrorism, nor does any other religion with which terrorist acts have been associated. Methods of terrorism, as underlined by many participants are employed by many different groups in many parts of the world in pursuit of various objectives which have nothing to do with the true image of Islam or any other religion. Participants suggested that the real motives which provide fertile environment for terrorism should be addressed by finding local solutions, including at grass roots level.

The vacuum in the lives of many young people caused by poverty as well as social and political exclusion can readily be filled by extreme ideologies associated with political violence and terrorism. The pressing need to explore the psychological and behavioral context to this, and how to develop and encourage alternative responses by vulnerable young people to the problems they face was emphasized.

The Conference recognized that international terrorism has dented the reputation of Muslims, despite the fact that many countries of the Muslim world are themselves victims of terrorism. The last few years have witnessed the growing phenomenon of Islamophobia, which has hindered proper understanding of Islam and Muslims. Islamophobia is gaining ground in the form of misperceptions and disinformation regarding Islam and intolerance and discrimination against Muslims.

As reiterated by the OIC, the international community must counter campaigns of calumny against Islam and Muslims to prevent the spread of Islamophobia which attempts to cause a rift between civilizations, a situation that has become a new form of racial discrimination.

The emergence of misguided groups that have deviated from the straight path to fanaticism, violence and extremism, attributing their acts to Islam, in no way justifies associating this phenomenon with the Islamic faith. True Islam is the religion of moderation and avoidance of excess, founded on the values of equality, justice, peace and brotherhood. Islam advocates tolerance, respect for other religions and calls for peace and mutual understanding. Hence, equal dialogue among religions and civilizations must become a key priority.

Dr. Abdulaziz Altwaijri, Director General of ISESCO, described dialogue as the "the ultimate purpose to safeguard shared values and preserve the principles of peace, human rights, tolerance, citizenship, democracy and education on anti-terrorism". In this regard, the conference called for closer proximity and improved communications between nations and societies based on the understanding of basic common values to all religions that are: compassion, solidarity and mutual respect.

Participants recognized the need to get away from stereotypes, generalizations and preconceptions, and refrain from allowing crimes committed by individuals or small groups to dictate the image of an entire people, an entire region or an entire religion. It was noted in particular that the responsible use of powerful means of outreach, such as the Internet, media and education (i.e. faith-based education), was instrumental in breaking the barriers of misconceptions. The Conference called for improving education not just about Islam, Christianity or Judaism but about all religions, traditions and cultures so that myths and distortions could be seen for what they are. It called for creating opportunities for young people, offering them a credible alternative to the propaganda of hate and extremism.

The Conference emphasized that dialogue among civilizations should be based on mutual respect, understanding and equality between nations and people as a prerequisite for establishing a world marked by tolerance , cooperation, peace and confidence among nations. The Conference called for combating pseudo-religious extremism, and reaffirmed the need to deepen dialogue and promote restraint, moderation and tolerance. While the freedom of expression is to be preserved, it should not be abused to spread hatred and denigrate the beliefs, cultures and religious symbols of peoples.

As noted by President Ben Ali, spectacular communication and technological evolution which ha enhanced the role of intellectuals and the media, as well as that of political parties, civil organizations and professional unions could facilitate the propagation of the values of freedom, justice, consensus and tolerance within societies by disseminating common universal values as a weapon to stand against all forms of excessiveness, fanaticism and racism.

The Conference supported advancing the work of the Alliance of Civilizations and wished success to holding the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum in January 2008 in Madrid which is expected to announce new initiatives and project-specific working sessions. Countering the rise of extremis and polarization will require closer cooperation and the establishment of strong solidarity ties among all partners. Participants acknowledged the importance of building more inclusive and pluralistic societies and creating bridges of respect between peoples and communities.

Inspired and guided by the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2006, the Conference supported the need for measures aimed at addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. In this regard, participants underlined the importance of implementing programs aimed at the reduction of poverty, unemployment and reinforcement of development and social inclusion agendas.

As underlined by President Ben Ali, "remedial policy relies essentially on improving the daily living conditions of the human being, through providing access to education and culture, promoting the conditions of women and youth, anchoring human rights, expanding the fields of consultation and participation, eradicating poverty and providing comprehensive and sustainable development for all regions and social categories".

There was broad consensus that the United Nations, ISESCO and the OIC should continue to closely cooperate in providing information and programs promoting tolerance and understanding among civilizations, cultures, peoples and religions.

The Conference stressed that the struggle against terrorism must be carried out in full compliance with the international human rights covenants and international humanitarian law. As highlighted by Dr. Altawajiri of ISESCO, "acknowledging the fundamental values of the rights to a decent life is a moral imperative for the entire humanity which entails that just measures and appropriate strategies be devised to enable building balanced human relations. Therefore, there is a need to work towards addressing the conditions conducive to the rise of feeling of injustice, exclusion and frustration. Participants emphasized that counter-terrorism policies and action needed to be carried out with full respect of human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law. All international institutions, including regional organizations and the specialized agencies of the UN system should carry out their functions in ways that strengthen the effort to eliminate terrorism and address conditions conducive to its spreading.

The participants noted with appreciation the call of the Tunisian President to convene an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations to formulate an international strategy to counter terrorism and to establish a code of conduct in this regard and the call of king Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz, to establish a specialized international centre for combating terrorism.

The participants found the holding of the Conference very useful. The Conference is a concrete step in the implementation of the Global Counter-terrorism Strategy which will contribute to broadening understanding between nations and cultures. It was hoped that the constructive dialogue which took place among the participants would be carried further upon their return to their respective countries, institutions and communities. Ideas expressed and lessons learned during this dialogue would contribute to the strengthening of tolerance, the promotion of moderation and the building of understanding between societies and cultures.

The participants extended their sincere gratitude to H.E President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of the Tunisian Republic, for his patronage of the conference and for the generous hospitality and kind reception, as well as for the facilitations provided by the Tunisian government for the success of the Conference. They also extended their gratitude and appreciation to the co-organizers of the Conference.

Annex II to the letter dated 26 November 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Statement by President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali at the opening of the International Conference on Terrorism: Dimensions, Threats and Countermeasures, at Carthage on 15 November 2007

It is my distinct pleasure to open the International Conference on "Terrorism : Dimensions, Threats and Countermeasures". On this occasion, I would like to extend a warm welcome to Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, to the representatives of the specialized UN, international, regional and Arab organizations, as well as to all experts, intellectuals, researchers and academics from sisterly and friendly countries. We are indeed proud to see them participate in this Conference, and wish them a pleasant stay in Tunisia, the country that has always been the crossroads of cultures and civilizations, and a bridge open to the world, promoting communication and dialogue on all that can serve rapprochement and mutual understanding among individuals, groups, peoples and nations.

I would like to thank Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and Mr. Abdulaziz Altwaijri, Director General of ISESCO, for their kind words and noble feelings toward Tunisia and its people. I seize this occasion to pay tribute to the United Nations and to the specialized international and regional organizations, particularly UNESCO, ISESCO and ALECSO, for the role they assume and the sustained action they undertake to promote dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions, and to anchor common universal values.

We consider the holding of this Conference in our country a reflection of our common determination to sustain all regional and international initiatives aimed at establishing security and peace in the world.

The intensification of social, economic, scientific and technological disparities between the countries of the North and of the South, the propagation of tensions and conflicts in the world, the failure to reach common and equitable solutions to outstanding international problems, in addition to the double standards policy adopted in addressing these problems, clearly show that our world today is not in good health, and that international relations call for concern and worry.

Any observer of the events taking place in the East as well as in the West, which shock the human conscience with their violence and awfulness, will soon realize the degree of gravity reached by the intensifying hatred and hostility among humans. In fact, the feelings of fear and mistrust generated by the September 11th, 2001 events, have caused relations between the Arab and Islamic societies and the European and American societies to fall within a circle of suspicion and misunderstanding.

Extremists from both sides have exploited these conditions to arouse grudges and rekindle conflicts. Western fundamentalism has anchored the hatred of the other and advocated the clash of cultures and civilizations. Islamic fundamentalism, on the other hand, has reached far extremes in reactionism and extremism, claiming to act in the name of Islam while this religion has nothing to do with this trend which seeks to impose its intellectual and ideological doctrines through violence and terrorism.

Terrorism is an aggressive behavior that runs counter to all ethical, religious, social and civilizational standards. It constitutes a flagrant violation of the sovereignty of states, the Charter of the United Nations, and all international treaties and charters. It is also an endemic phenomenon that has always marked the history of humanity since olden times. No society and no civilization has escaped this phenomenon. It is not specific to any particular religion, nor to any particular country. In modern times, terrorism has become a transcontinental scourge that unsettles international relations and threatens security and stability in the world.

That is why the international community has recently undertaken to unify its efforts against terrorism, and to adopt the necessary measures to prevent its occurrence and propagation.

In our view, achieving this objective largely depends on the methods we adopt to combat terrorism, the most important of which being : no countering of violence by violence; no exclusive reliance on security solutions which, though necessary, remain insufficient; and no hesitation in eliminating the pretexts used by terrorist groups to continue propagating their inflammatory discourse and inciting people for extremist reactions.

In our view, the most efficient remedy is the preventive remedy. It starts by eradicating the root causes underlying the rise of terrorism and the conditions that facilitate its propagation. Such remedial policy relies essentially on improving the daily living conditions of the human being, through providing access to education and culture, promoting the conditions of women and youth, anchoring human rights, expanding the fields of consultation and participation, eradicating poverty, and providing comprehensive and sustainable development for all regions and social categories.

Events have shown that the individual who is deprived of the most basic attributes of life, who suffers ignorance, destitution, isolation and marginalization, and who lives within a climate of doubt, inaction, neglect and frustration, is often the one who easily falls prey to extremism and terrorist action.

That is why since the early days of the November 7, 1987 Change, we have considered that the promotion of our national affairs depends on the promotion of our educational, cultural, social and economic conditions, as well as on the elimination of all forms of deprivation and disparity which generate feelings of injustice and inequity, and create a tendency for despair and frustration. From the start, we have adopted an ambitious national plan for reform, development, upgrading and modernization; a plan that establishes a close correlation between economic prosperity and social progress in all development sectors, and offers our people the attributes of dignity and pride.

We have placed the sector of education and training in the forefront of our national choices. We have made of education a legitimate right, free and compulsory for all Tunisian men and women. We have founded education on our cultural, civilizational and religious constants, as well as on the noblest universal values.

We have been keen on instilling in our young generations, through the subjects they are taught, the sense of awareness of rights and duties, on deepening their commitment to the virtues of dialogue and respect of different opinions, and on prompting them for showing diligence and rationality, for rejecting fanaticism and racism, for adopting a civilized behavior, for having moderate positions and reactions, and for assimilating modern knowledge and technologies. We have offered them the opportunity, from the basic education stage, to acquire two foreign languages in order to allow them to communicate with the cultures of the world.

In this context, we have offered special care to our youth in our political, social and economic choices. We have regularly listened to them in order to be aware of their concerns and ambitions. We have involved them in the management of public life at the local, regional and national levels. We have deepened dialogue with them through youth consultations organized on a regular basis, such as the consultations held in 1996, 2000 and 2005 whose results have been taken into consideration in elaborating our development plans. We have offered our youth a varied network of centers, clubs, institutions, and cultural, sports and leisure establishments in all the regions of the country, in order to preserve their psychological and social balance, enrich their educational training, and consolidate their relations with their environment.

We have made of employment an absolute priority in our policy, to which we have devoted all our means and mechanisms, so as to ensure for our youth a secure future and a decent life.

We have considered culture as an element of support to the action of reform and modernization we are undertaking in our society. We have offered intellectuals all due care and encouragement, away from any form of supervision, censorship or suppression. We have increased the budget allocated for culture so that it reaches 1% of the State budget currently, and 1.5% in 2009. We have made of culture a national affair that concerns all individuals, social categories and regions, through which we prepare our people to keep up with the current changes and developments, and to meet the stakes and challenges with which it is confronted.

We are proud of the high sense of civic responsibility that our intellectuals have constantly shown, with constancy and vitality, in their souls and minds, while expressing our people's concerns and aspirations, and defending its spiritual, social and civilizational values.

They have thus confirmed that freedom cannot be synonymous with impartiality or resignation; it is rather a spontaneous national commitment prompting intellectuals to be concerned with the challenges and changes occurring in their society, and with the tensions and crises taking place in the world around them.

That is why we have highly appreciated the position of Tunisian intellectuals who, in the late 1980s, rushed to stand against the advocates of extremism and violence, by countering their views, refuting their doctrines, unveiling their deviations, and denouncing the ideological and material terrorism they were practicing. Through these positions, they proved that standing against fanaticism, reactionism and extremism is not the responsibility of the State alone; it is rather a responsibility shared by all civil society components.

We are convinced that the accumulation of problems in our time, coupled with the spectacular communication and technological evolution, have enhanced the role of intellectuals and the media, as well as that of political parties, civil organizations, and professional unions, so that they all serve as a model in embracing the values of freedom, justice, consensus and tolerance within their societies, in disseminating common universal values, and in standing against all forms of excessiveness, fanaticism and racism.

The pioneers of reform and enlightenment and the leaders of liberation and modernization in our country have, since the early 20th century, realized that a nation would not achieve full progress without the promotion of woman's status and the development of their conditions in the family and in society.

This is, in fact, what Tunisia had undertaken since the first year of Independence, when the Leader Habib Bourguiba promulgated the Code of Personal Status on August 13, 1956; thus severing all ties with the eras of social and cultural backwardness, and laying the ground for a new national stage offering women equity and asserting their equality with men in rights and duties.

After the November 7, 1987 Change, we decided to protect, promote and enrich this Code. On August 13, 1992, we took a set of measures aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and reinforcing the family's cohesion and stability. This in addition to the relevant amendments we have introduced into the Penal Code, the Labor Code and the Nationality Code.

We have also given a constitutional force to the principles of personal status, proceeding from our belief that no society can achieve progress without an effective and permanent partnership between men and women in all fields of life.

Tunisian women today are a brilliant reflection of modernity in Tunisia . They are present in all fields of work, production and action. They assume the highest positions within executive, legislative and administrative institutions. They undertake various educational, cultural and sports activities. They are involved in various economic, scientific and technical occupations. They are largely present within the components of our associative fabric. Their high sense of awareness, strong personality, authentic attachment to their Arab Muslim identity, and rational integration within the spirit of their time, have all qualified Tunisian women to preserve their gains, and to serve as an element of stability and balance in their society, and as a strong rampart against the advocates of backwardness and reactionism.

You are certainly aware of the complex changes and preoccupations that have altered, in this time of ours, the role of fathers and mothers in many fields, as a result of the pressures of social and economic life, so that they can no longer devote enough time to provide all due care to their children. This requires that we all deepen reflection on this issue and look for the ways and means to optimize complementarity between the roles of the school, the family and civil society components, so that we leave no room for the advocates of extremism and violence to fill this gap in a way that serves their ends.

Alongside the care we have offered to our people's social conditions, we have given all due attention to the system of human rights in its comprehensive dimensions covering all sectors of development. Through this system, we have consecrated the right of all Tunisian men and women to enjoy the basic attributes of decent life and to have access to income and well-being.

In this context, we established the National Solidarity Fund in 1993, the Tunisian Solidarity Bank in 1997, and the National Employment Fund in 1997; our aim being to diversify the mechanisms that promote solidarity and mutual support among all citizens, improve living conditions for the poor and the destitute, increase opportunities of assistance and support to small manufacturers, craftsmen and farmers so that they can improve their professional conditions, and open up wider prospects for university graduates to engage in self-employment, create projects

and provide jobs. We have provided over one million Tunisian citizens with basic facilities and equipments, as well as with the means of construction and development. We have thus brought them out of the circle of isolation and marginalization, transformed their regions into areas offering the attributes of well-being, and integrated them within active life and the economic cycle.

These initiatives and achievements have helped us improve our country's human development indicators at the quantitative and qualitative levels. For instance, the schooling rate for six-year-old boys and girls has exceeded 99%; the per capita income of the Tunisian citizen amounts to 4,394 dinars per year; the poverty rate has been brought down to 3.8%; the middle class has been expanded so that it now represents over 80% of the population; the social security cover rate exceeds 98%; and life expectancy at birth has increased to reach more than 74 years.

To anchor our people's identity and preserve its cultural and civilizational specificities, we have endeavored to protect our Islamic religion from all forms of misrepresentation, and to disseminate its noble principles and values, which call for interpretative thinking and rationality, advocate moderation, golden mean, and tolerance, and reject exclusion, excessiveness and fanaticism.

It is to be pointed out, in this context, that the principles carried by Islam are also shared by the two other monotheistic religions, Judaism and Christianity. Hence the responsibility vested in those in charge of the three religions to consecrate the virtues they share, and to promote dialogue among their followers, within a context of consensus, coexistence and mutual respect.

In the same vein, we have to underline the fact that the terrorist groups that are attributed to Islam, and which are causing the greatest harm to Islam and Muslims, are in no way representative of our sublime religion; they are rather a strange phenomenon that has emerged out of certain circumstances in Arab and Islamic societies, and will fade away with the disappearance of those circumstances.

Islam, in fact, has nothing to do with extremism, violence and terrorism. It is a religion of moderation, peace, dialog) and tolerance. This clearly finds its illustration in many Koranic verses such as : "Thus have We made of you an Ummah of the golden mean") " Let there be no compulsion in religion") " Invite to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best", and " If they incline towards peace, incline thou also towards it ".

This in addition to the virtues and exploits marking the history of Muslims, and reflecting the sublime nature and noble principles of Islam which advocates humanism and universal fraternity.

Tunisia, which reiterates its condemnation of the confusion, prevailing today in the West, between terrorism and Islam, and expresses its consternation for the harassment and unjustified smear campaigns to which Muslims are exposed, will move ahead in promoting dialogue among peoples, cultures, civilizations and religions, in order to help reduce the misunderstanding, divergence and mutual hatred prevailing in international relations. This is, in fact, a constant tenet in our choices and orientations. On April 21, 1995, we issued, in cooperation with UNESCO, the "Carthage Charter for Tolerance". In November 2001, we established an "Academic Chair for Dialogue among Civilizations and Religions". In December 2002, we created the "Prize of the President of the Republic for Islamic Studies", in order to enrich interpretative thinking in our sublime religion. In May 2003, we established, in cooperation with the Secretariat General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the "Tunis Peace Forum". In June 2005, we created the "Center for Studies and Research on Inter-civilization Dialogue and Comparative Religions". In February 2006, we issued, in cooperation with ISESCO, the "Tunis Declaration for Alliance among Civilizations".

Each year, meetings and conferences on dialogue among peoples, cultures, civilizations and religions are held by Tunisian civil institutions, organizations and associations.

Our country will continue playing host to such meetings and conferences, proceeding from its strong belief in their ethical impact at the international level, and its determination to join its efforts to those of the forces of good in the world, in order to anchor, generalize, deepen and expand the culture of dialogue; this latter being the optimum path and the most appropriate framework to get rid of accumulated prejudices, conventional stereotypes, and the feelings of hatred and racism each party harbors vis-à-vis the other.

Fortunately, the new means of communication, with their various networks, particularly the Internet, offer us today further opportunities for meeting and communication in an unprecedented way. We can indeed contribute to enriching the fields of mutual understanding and cooperation among us, provided that we give primacy to the ethical side in using those means of communication.

While expressing our appreciation as to the growing awareness of the virtues of dialogue at the local, regional and international levels, we consider that this dialogue will be of no use unless all parties preserve its integrity, credibility and noble objectives; for this dialogue will then lead us to build a strong alliance against the negative aspects and the injustices threatening world peace and stability.

In this regard, we have called for adopting a comprehensive approach to international relations, based on a close correlation between peace, security and development. In 1988, we suggested the conclusion of a Contract for Peace and Progress between the North and the South. And in 2002, we called for establishing a world fund for solidarity and poverty eradication, which was unanimously adopted by the UN General Assembly.

Tunisia , which had realized early the threat posed by extremism and terrorism, was, from the 1990s, among the first to have warned against the pernicious consequences of this phenomenon, and stressed the need for intensifying cooperation in order to guard against it and eradicate it. In 2003, we called for holding an international conference, under the auspices of the United Nations, to formulate an international strategy to counter terrorism and address its root causes, and to establish a code of ethics in this regard, to which all countries shall be committed.

We are convinced that the countries' awareness today of the gravity of terrorism, and their joining the UN, continental and regional conventions established to counter terrorism and eradicate its root causes, particularly the conventions adopted by the UN General Assembly, the Security Council, and the specialized international organizations and institutions, will provide propitious conditions for establishing an efficient and comprehensive international cooperation against terrorism, and for achieving an equitable and solidarity-based development that will reduce development disparities among countries.

We strongly believe that the acuity of the current international situation can in no way weaken our determination to set it right, to change it, and to guard against its dangers, as long as we all have the necessary courage to put an end to the injustices experienced by some peoples, the most conspicuous of which being the injustice incurred by the brotherly Palestinian people, and as long as we insist on adopting a just and comprehensive approach in addressing issues, without selectivity or giving primacy to one at the expense of the others.

The security, stability and prosperity of countries are indissociable from the security, stability and prosperity of the world. This should deepen the universal dimension in our thinking and behavior; this dimension being a moral commitment that consecrates communication and mutual understanding among us, regardless of our diverse racial, religious and cultural specificities, and irrespective of the disparities of progress and growth separating countries. Humanity is indeed an indivisible whole. Our world is everywhere the same, and our destiny is also the same. We have no other path but to engage in cooperation and solidarity, so that we can face together the dangers and threats confronting us and serve together our interests and benefits.

To conclude, I reiterate to you my greetings and welcome, wishing your Conference all success.

Thank you for your attention.

United Nations A/62/553

General Assembly

Distr.: General
28 November 2007

Original: English

Sixty-second session
Agenda item 49
Culture of peace

Letter dated 26 November 2007 from the Permanent Representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I avail myself of this opportunity to transmit to you the Declaration for Promoting Dialogue and Mutual Understanding among Religions and Civilizations, "Ohrid 2007" (see annex), adopted at the World Conference on Dialogue among Religions and Civilizations, "The Contribution of Religion and Culture to Peace, Mutual Respect and Cooperation", held in Ohrid, Republic of Macedonia, from 26 to 28 October 2007.

I should be grateful if you would arrange for the present letter and its annex to be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 49, "Culture of peace".

(*Signed*) Goran **Stevcevski**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

07-61792 (E) 071207

Annex to the letter dated 26 November 2007 from the Permanent Representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Declaration for Promoting Dialogue and Mutual Understanding among Religions and Civilizations

World Conference on Dialogue among Religions and Civilizations: "The Contribution of Religion and Culture to Peace, Mutual Respect and Cooperation"

26-28 October 2007, Ohrid, Republic of Macedonia

Preamble

- Deeply aware of the strong role of faith in life, values and moral codes and the overall socialization of each person as a part of the wider community he or she lives in naturally;
- Convinced of the contribution of faith and culture to peace, mutual understanding and cooperation;
- Recognizing the importance of the ideas of mutual tolerance, understanding and building bridges for cooperation among nations, communities and countries;
- Working on a culture of dialogue, tolerance and peace for the purpose of improving prosperity, welfare and mutual cooperation among nations and countries of the world;

We, the participants in the World Conference on Dialogue among Religions and Civilizations, the spiritual leaders and representatives of the religious communities and denominations, as well as of the 50 countries we belong to, unanimously and with a feeling of profound personal and wider civilization responsibility adopt the present declaration:

Declaration for Promoting Dialogue and Mutual Understanding among Religions and Civilizations
"Ohrid 2007"

1. The common good, justice, solidarity and human rights, implemented through kind words and deeds, are the guiding light of our efforts in affirming unity in the world and in ensuring its progress and survival, according to the religious and moral principles we apply to ourselves and others. The practice of faith should have the purpose of realizing profound spiritual and moral values.

2. We emphasize the importance of knowing and practicing our respective religions, which talk of faith, hope and love among all and for all. At the same time, we state that only through the creation of wide cooperation between civilizations, based on the principles of mutual respect and esteem, shall we contribute to the creation of the preconditions for understanding other religions.

3. Human history is rich in major achievements and setbacks, rises and falls. Religion is a driving force, one that gives meaning, moral principles and positive guidance.

4. We strongly condemn all forms of religious violence and any justification for it. We condemn the abuse of religion and all types of discrimination and actions that humiliate human dignity. We ask believers of all religions to act according to the principle of reciprocity: let us treat others now as we would like them to treat us.

5. We are fully dedicated to the strengthening and development of the dialogue among different faiths, cultures and civilizations. Love is in the foundation of every religion. We condemn any interpretation of religion that preaches terror since no reason can justify terror and murder. Aware that prejudice, mistrust and fear give birth to terrorism, we, the participants in this conference, are committed to promoting mutual respect of cultures and confessions.

6. We declare that respect for the rights of different ethnic and religious communities is essential to the promotion of mutual dialogue among different confessions, civilizations and cultures. Aware that religious and cultural diversity should be a bridge for cooperation and understanding, we state that by resolving the problems of smaller religious and cultural communities in countries, while respecting traditional values of the majority communities, many sources of instability within and between States may be prevented.

7. Education, as a significant pillar in the forming of strong ethical personalities, represents the main basis for promoting tolerance, dialogue and understanding among religions and civilizations, respect for the differences, of human rights and traditional moral values. Adequate education is the main instrument for removing stereotypes, as well as the misperceptions of different cultures, religions and civilizations.

8. We are entirely dedicated to raising awareness of the need and the importance of mutual respect among religious leaders and believers. This should also be understood as an obligation of States, which, through the education of new generations, cultivate the spirit of the higher values of civilization. Learning to live together means recognition of our differences as an asset, not as a disadvantage. We commit ourselves to the creation of an educational system for a new generation of young people, a generation that shall promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence, and not hate and prejudice.

9. We fully accept the diversity of religious beliefs, cultural traditions and civilizations' experience as an unavoidable part of shared human values. There are no superior or inferior civilizations, races, cultures and languages.

10. The modern global environment entails many new challenges and temptations for individuals, communities and States. Dialogue and mutual understanding and respect point to the need for mobilizing political leaders, spiritual leaders, intellectuals and all other social actors. Therefore, the commitment to dialogue among different civilizations and religions is simultaneously a commitment to fight against terrorism and instability.

11. We stress the great importance of the empowerment of women.

12. This world conference is a significant meeting which presents an opportunity for us to see the reality, to determine the obstacles and to find solutions to the

problems we face. It is an impetus for further meetings and contacts at all levels, as well as a strong message to citizens from all countries that religious peace and tolerance are a reality and that we must all continue to work for their survival.

13. We, the participants in this conference, send a message to the institutions of the United Nations to maintain the momentum and to strengthen their commitment to the promotion of dialogue among religions, cultures and civilizations.

14. We support the idea of establishing a Steering Council of Religions under the auspices of the United Nations that could promote dialogue among religions, cultures and civilizations.

15. The Declaration for Promoting the Dialogue and Mutual Understanding among Religions and Civilizations shall be submitted to the United Nations General Assembly, the High Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for the Alliance of Civilizations, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the African Union, the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations, the Organization of American States, the World Council of Churches, the International Organization of Francophonie and other regional and international organizations, as well as to the Governments of the States Members of the United Nations.

29 October 2007, Ohrid, Republic of Macedonia